

**Remarks of Mayor Paul D. Fraim
Celebration of the Return of Passenger Rail to Norfolk
and South Hampton Roads
Tuesday, December 11, 2012
3 PM
at Harbor Park**

Good afternoon and thank you for being here. It's not every day we have a chance to be part of history, but I think we can all agree that today is an historic moment, so on behalf of the City of Norfolk, I am both pleased and proud to welcome you to this celebration of the return of passenger rail service to Norfolk and South Hampton Roads. It is a major addition to our mass transit network and to the local economy.

We have a lot of distinguished guests here today – too many, in fact, to mention them all. But I do want to take just a second to recognize our platform guests. We are honored that Governor Bob McDonnell is able to be with us - and Governor, welcome.

Also with us are Secretary of Transportation Sean Connaughton, Director of Rail and Public Transportation and Norfolk native Thelma Drake, Mr. Joseph Boardman, president and CEO of AMTRAK, Tom Carper, chairman of the board of AMTRAK, Wick Moorman, chairman, president and CEO of Norfolk Southern Corporation, whose corporate headquarters are just a short walk up Main Street from here, and Ms. Ellen Fitzsimmons, executive vice president for law and public affairs for CSX Corporation. We are also joined by members of AMTRAK's board of directors, members of the Virginia General Assembly, local elected officials from Hampton Roads and the Richmond region and friends from the private sector and the community. Thank you all for sharing this moment with us.

Ever since the 19th century, railroads have played a vital role in the growth and development of Norfolk and Hampton Roads. Railroads reduced the region's geographic isolation caused by its coastal location and numerous waterways. The railroad offered a new method for moving agricultural products, raw materials and manufactured goods more efficiently into and out of the region. It was the railroads that made Norfolk the nation's largest coal port, and that made travel outside the region easier and less expensive. The giants of yesterday - Norfolk and Western, Chesapeake & Ohio, the Virginian, the Southern Railway, and the giants of today - Norfolk Southern Corporation and CSX Corporation, all have made important contributions to our prosperity.

Up until the end of World War II, passenger rail was the preferred way to travel long distances. But the airline industry's rapid growth, along with the automobile and the interstate highway system, left passenger rail on life support. In an effort to revive it, Congress created AMTRAK in 1970. But by then, many believed the death of passenger rail was only a matter of time. As if to validate that prediction, in 1977 AMTRAK ended passenger service in Norfolk.

But history demonstrates that predicting the future is a tricky business. Growing economic pressures, the frustrations of daily gridlock on the highways and the unpredictability of air travel have caused a resurgence of passenger rail service. So we gather here today at this site, which is also historic, to welcome back passenger rail service to Norfolk and South Hampton Roads after a 35 year absence. Starting tomorrow, residents, business people and members of the armed forces will be able to board an AMTRAK train here at Harbor Park, next to our successful light rail line, The Tide, and travel in safety, comfort and convenience to Washington, DC, to New York City and to points further north.

This goal was not achieved easily, or by accident, or by luck. It was achieved by the dedicated efforts and hard work of our many partners, and there is no better time than now to recognize them.

At the State level, the support of Governor McDonnell, the General Assembly and, of course, Thelma Drake and the Department of Rail and Public Transportation was critical. The State's financial support breathed life into the project, allowing for improvements to the alignment to Petersburg and for rail operations. Thank you for everything you have done and continue to do in support of rail service.

At the Federal level, the support of our congressional delegation, of Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood and of AMTRAK president Joe Boardman and his board was essential to bringing passenger rail service back to Norfolk. We are deeply grateful for your commitment to this part of Virginia.

I also want to thank my colleagues on the council who embraced the idea of passenger rail service right out of the gate. Just as important has been the support from elected officials across the region – and particularly from the Peninsula – who expressed their support of passenger rail for South Hampton Roads by a unanimous vote at the Planning District Commission. Thank you for your friendship and for your commitment to our regional partnership.

But all the support from the region, from the State and from the Federal government would have gone for nothing if our special partners - Norfolk Southern and CSX – had not embraced the project. The NS worked swiftly to improve the alignment from Harbor Park to Petersburg. CSX worked quickly on its end to forge the new connection between the two lines at Petersburg. Work was completed in record time, and made it possible for service to begin 10 months earlier than initially projected, so thanks to both railroads for your great work.

And, of course, it almost goes without saying that none of this would have happened without the steadfast effort and stewardship of our city manager Marcus Jones and City Administration.

Residents and businesses across Hampton Roads have also been generous and vocal supporters of intercity passenger rail. Your message was clear - and clearly received - that passenger rail for the Southside was vital to the region's economy now and for the future.

The near universal support intercity passenger rail received has been nothing short of amazing and has been very gratifying. I thank each and every one of you for helping us achieve such a major improvement to the transportation network in Hampton Roads.

And now, I'm pleased to introduce our next speaker, the honorable Thelma Drake. Over the years Thelma has represented Norfolk with distinction in the Virginia General Assembly House of Delegates and as a member of the House of Representative in the United States Congress. Two years ago, Governor McDonnell appointed her director of rail and public transportation. In that capacity, she has made numerous and important contributions to the effort to bring passenger rail service to Norfolk and South Hampton Roads, and I would ask you to join me in welcoming her.